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Meramec State Park

TRAIL AND NATURAL AREA GUIDE
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The Missouri Department of Natural Resources is the state agency responsible for the wise use of Missouri's natural resources.

Meramec State Park

TRAIL AND NATURAL AREA GUIDE

Meramec State Park lies along one of the most scenic stretches of one of Missouri's most beautiful rivers—the Meramec. In the expansive regions of the park that lie beyond the principal park facilities, there are wonderful opportunities for hikers to explore varied Meramec valley landscapes, from rich thick forests to high bluffs, to narrow hollows carved by trickling streams. This brochure briefly describes some of these lands and the trails that provide access to these areas of the park.

NATURAL HISTORY

Several hundred million years ago what is now Meramec State Park lay beneath a shallow sea. As countless tiny sea creatures died, their shells were compressed into layers of flat dolomite rock. Eventually a giant thrust of the earth's crust pushed this rock, the Ozark plateau, out of the sea. Rainwater filtered down through this flat plateau, dissolving the rock and forming water-filled voids. Streams and rivers eventually eroded down to these water-filled voids, and, as the water drained, they became air-filled caves. There have been more than 30 caves recorded so far in Meramec State Park and more than 4,500 recorded in the state.

The Meramec River and its tributaries have eroded so deeply into the land that it is difficult to see the level plain on which they originated. In fact, the section of the river that runs through the park is more than 400 feet lower than the surrounding uplands.

Due to the thousands of years of erosion, this ancient landscape is now a very rugged one and the dissected hills in the park display a variety of interesting natural communities. Here you can find where different plants and animals make their homes, each filling a specific niche as the environment changes from valley floor to ridgetop. These adaptations to the environment are remarkably well represented in the Meramec Upland Forest Natural Area. You may see a lady slipper orchid tucked away on a moist hillside; a rare red-shouldered hawk, which is known to nest in undisturbed bottomlands along the Meramec River; or a desertlike glade opening on south-facing slopes. These are all testimony to the ancient natural cycles that you can learn more about as you hike the trails at Meramec State Park.

THE NATURAL AREA PROGRAM

Missouri has been blessed with an unusual diversity of native plants, animals, and scenic areas. The state has some of the largest springs in North America and the greatest number of caves of any state. There are tallgrass prairies, deep rich forests, barren glades, and numerous crystal-clear streams. All these contribute to an unusually varied, beautiful, and interesting natural history that has helped shape Missouri's cultural history.

As you tour Missouri's state parks, you will learn about our state's natural and cultural heritage. To ensure that special recognition and protection is afforded to some of the significant natural elements, certain areas have been designated as Missouri natural areas. Natural areas are managed to protect their scientific values. They are formally recognized as the least-disturbed and highest-quality biological and geological sites across the state.

You are invited to explore Missouri natural areas as you tour Missouri's state park system.

MERAMEC UPLAND FOREST NATURAL AREA

The 461-acre Meramec Upland Forest Natural Area is one of Missouri's best examples of a forest community that typically grows on well-drained cherty soil formed from dolomite rock. Much of the area is a forest dominated by white oak, black oak, and black hickory trees. Beneath these grow shade-loving flowering dogwoods and serviceberries that add a dazzle of white blossoms to the forest in spring. In summer and fall, wild turkeys feast on one of the dominant shrubs in the forest, the lowbush blueberry. Although these plants characterize the typical forest of the natural area, there are also many other interesting plant communities.

On the south side of several ridges, excessively drained rocky slopes have led to the development of dolomite glades. On these glades the bedrock is at or near the surface and soils, which are very thin, support prairie grasses and wildflowers. Rock outcrops are often exposed over the surface of a glade, and persimmons and red cedars are scattered in otherwise open areas. In spring, when water is usually most abundant, these glades erupt in color from plants like Indian paintbrush, rose verbena, and orange puccoon.

At the base of north-facing hillsides, moisture-loving black walnuts, white oak, northern red oak, and basswood trees are common members of the dense forest canopy. The moist, rich soils also allow for a well-developed understory where paw paw trees, spicebush, and flowering dogwood thrive.

The first explorers to these forests were French prospectors. Although the French had little success looking for minerals in this area, prospectors in the mid-1800s discovered a deposit of copper just west of the present natural area. Water power from a spring in the natural area was used by the early miners to run a pump that supplied air to their smelter furnace. Today, however, nearly all traces of man's activities have been erased by years of forest succession.

Despite the lack of recent human disturbance in the natural area, nature has taken its toll. A tremendous windstorm struck the area on July 2, 1980, with winds in excess of 90 miles per hour. In some places more than half of the mature trees were heavily damaged. Although some of the majestic trees now lay on their sides, they still contribute to the special character of the area by providing shelter to numerous types of wildlife.

Caves also provide shelter for inhabitants of the natural area. Bobcats use the smaller caves for dens and some of our rarest bats use the larger caves for home. Gray and Indiana bats, which are both endangered species, inhabit caves in the natural area. To protect these beneficial animals, gates have been constructed over the entrance of two caves. One of these caves is closed year-round because of the presence of bats, while the other is closed only part of the year.

THE TRAILS

Meramec State Park offers developed camping and day-use areas, overnight accommodations, and dining facilities, but most of the park's 6,734 acres are traversed only by trails. These trails can guide you to open glades dotted with Indian paintbrush, lush ravines laced with walking fern, gold and red hillsides ablaze with fall color, and quiet places seldom visited by the majority of the park's visitors. If you have never taken the time to explore the park on foot, why not give it a try? A whole new experience is awaiting you.

BLUFF VIEW TRAIL - 1.5 MILES

Bluff View Trail is a loop trail with access points at the picnic area, the lodge area, and the southern end of the campground. This very popular trail provides outstanding views atop bluffs overlooking the Meramec River. Two trail shelters constructed during the 1930s by the Civilian Conservation Corps are located along this trail. The trail is of moderate difficulty and designed for hiking use only. It is signed with blue arrows in a clockwise direction.

WALKING FERN TRAIL - .5 MILE

The trail's namesake is a large fern-covered boulder located near the midpoint of the trail. Although the trail is the shortest in the park, it is also one of the most interesting. This is largely due to the trail's sharp change in elevation that allows you to pass through several major plant communities. The trail begins and ends near the entrance of Fisher Cave, which is a nice cool place to visit after a summer hike. Walking Fern Trail is designated for hiking use only. It is signed with green arrows in a counterclockwise direction.

DEER HOLLOW TRAIL - 1.8 MILES

Deer Hollow Trail is a point-to-point hiking trail that leads from the lodge area to Fisher Cave. Cabin guests may want to consider using this trail as an alternative to driving to Fisher Cave. Deer Hollow Trail was constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps and was one of the park's original trails. The trail is marked with yellow arrows.

WILDERNESS TRAIL - 6 MILES

Wilderness Trail is a loop trail that begins near the cabin area. It is a trail of moderate difficulty, but due to its length should not be attempted by beginning hikers unless accompanied by someone more experienced. This trail enters the southwest corner of Meramec Upland Forest Natural Area and can be used as access for exploring this area. This trail in the future will be opened to backpacking, but at the present time it is only open to hikers. The trail is signed in a counterclockwise direction with red arrows.

RIVER TRAIL - .8 MILE

River trail is a loop trail that begins at the southern end of the campground. Part of this trail winds along the western bank of the Meramec River. At its midpoint, the trail passes through a trail shelter built by the Civilian Conservation Corps. At this location, hikers can gain access to the scenic Bluff View Trail. River Trail is the easiest trail in the park to hike. It is signed in a counterclockwise direction with yellow arrows.

NATURAL WONDERS TRAIL - 1.3 MILES

Natural Wonders Trail is a treasure chest of diversity. Mature forests, caves, glades, old fields, and beaver ponds are a few of the reasons there is always something exciting to discover along this trail. Each of these habitats shelters special groups of plants and animals, which indicate the complexity of the natural world. The trail is signed in a clockwise direction with red arrows.

THE ETHICS OF GOOD TRAIL USE

- Carry out what you carry in. If the trail users before you have not done this, you can help by removing their trash, too.
- Keep your group small. Groups of more than 10 persons usually damage the environment.
- Dispose of human waste properly. Fortunately, the top six or eight inches of soil provide a system of biologic disposers that decompose organic material. Keeping this in mind, hikers should select a spot at least 100 feet from any open water; dig a small hole no deeper than six or eight inches; after use, fill the hole with loose soil and tramp in the sod; nature will do the rest.
- Stay on the trail. Do not take shortcuts. The trail has been laid out to minimize destruction of surrounding vegetation and to prevent erosion.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

- When hiking into remote areas of the park, inform someone of your intended route and anticipated time of return.
- If it becomes necessary to drink water from streams or springs, it should always be purified by boiling or chemical treatment. Many streams and springs contain high levels of bacteria.

If you have any questions concerning the trails or natural areas at Meramec State Park, please write the park superintendent or naturalist at Route 4, Box 4, Sullivan, MO 63080, or call (314) 468-6072.

For information on the more than 300 miles of trail and 27 natural areas in other state parks, contact the Missouri Department of Natural Resources, P.O. Box 176, Jefferson City, MO 65102, or call 1-800-334-6946.

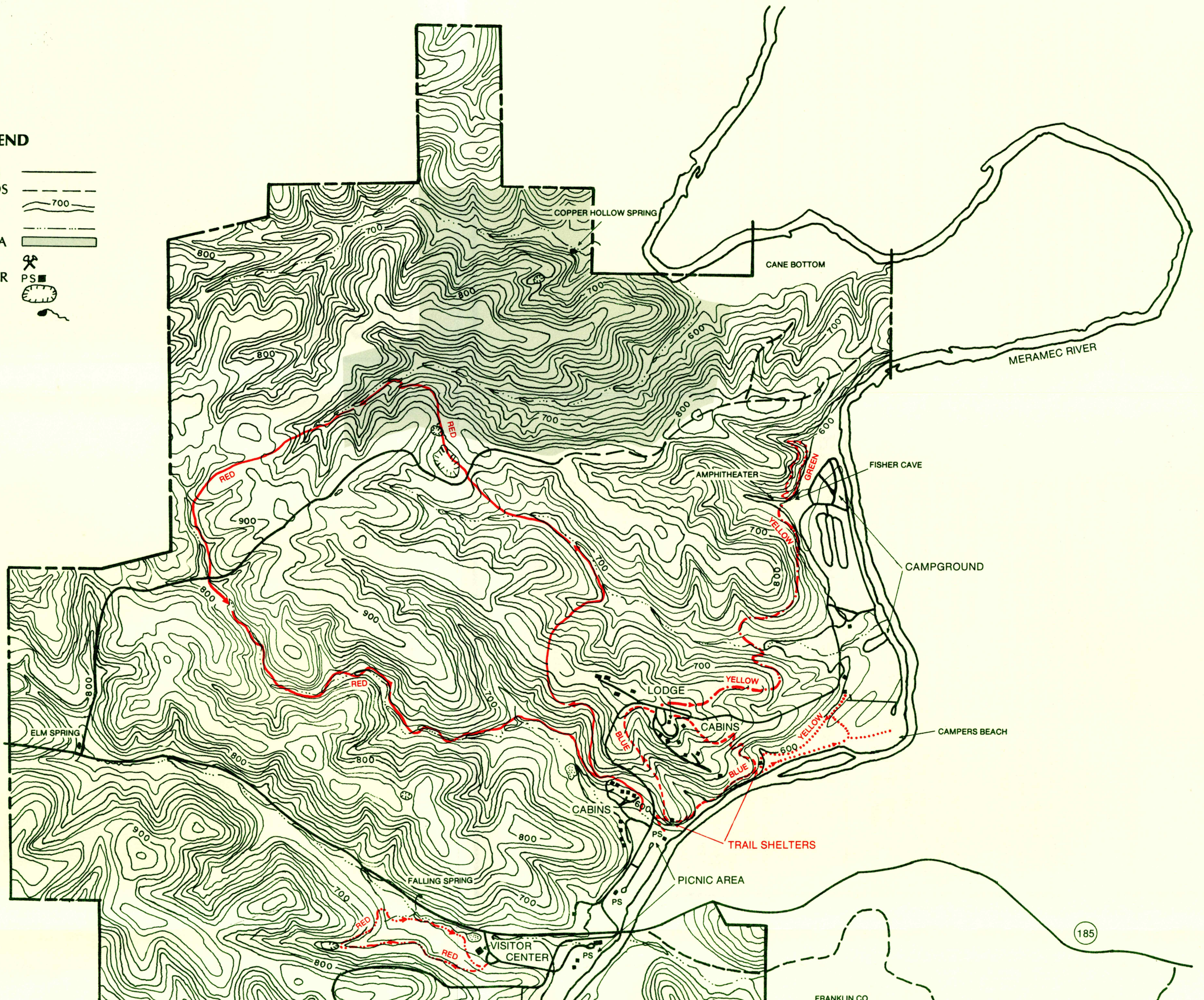
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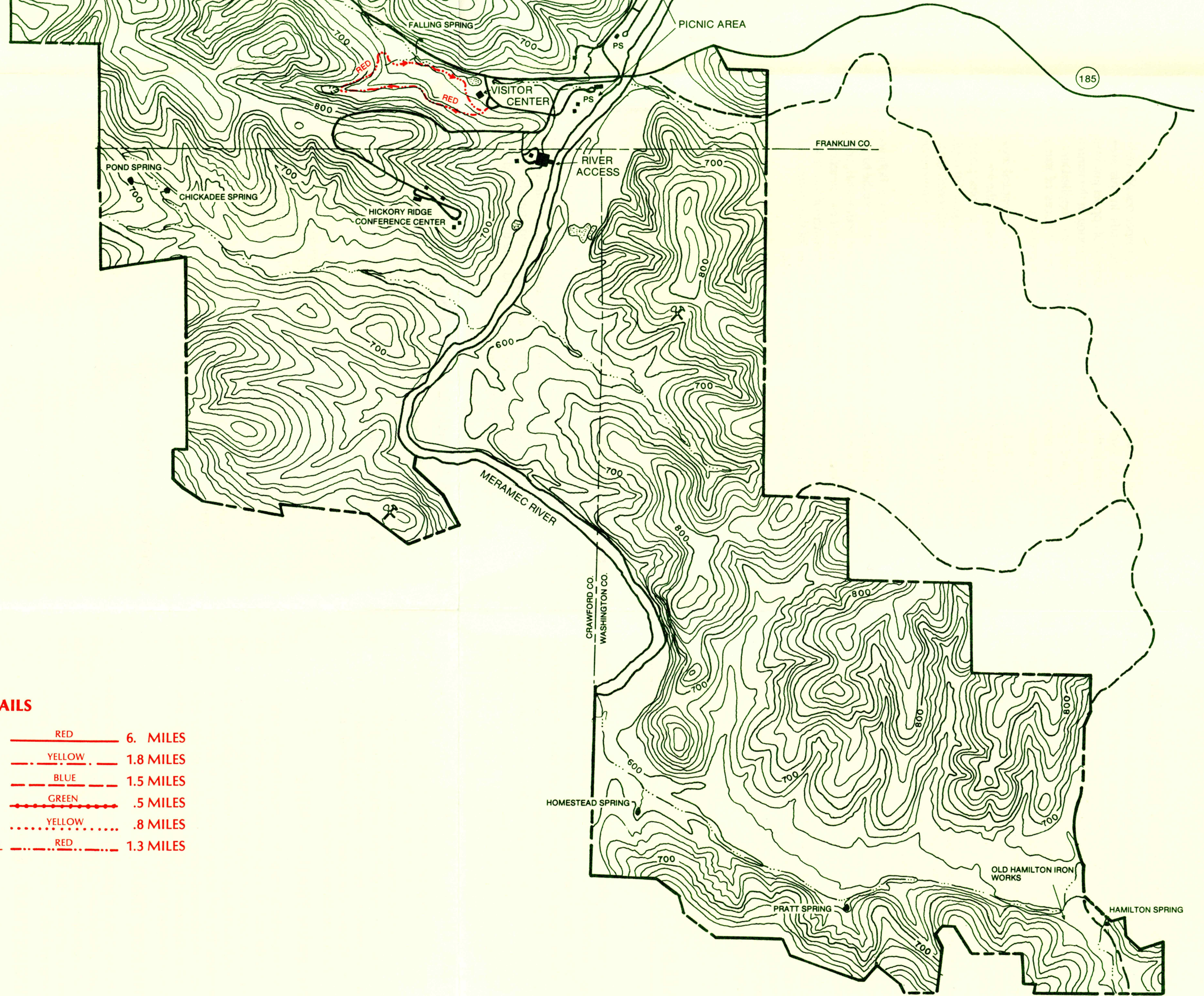
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TRAILS

WILDERNESS TRAIL	RED	6. MILES
DEER HOLLOW TRAIL	YELLOW	1.8 MILES
BLUFF VIEW TRAIL	BLUE	1.5 MILES
WALKING FERN TRAIL	GREEN	.5 MILES
RIVER TRAIL	YELLOW	.8 MILES
NATURAL WONDERS TRAIL	RED	1.3 MILES